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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 002862

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP. NEA/ARP PLEASE PASS TO USTR JASON BUNTIN. STATE FOR NEA/REA CHARLES LAWSON.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [EWWT](#) [YM](#) [ENVIRONMENT](#)

SUBJECT: TOP 3 YEMEN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: WATER, WATER, WATER

1. Summary/comment. Several critical environmental issues face Yemen: overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification, sandstorms and summer dust storms. The most crucial issue, however, is the lack of potable water which affects the majority of Yemen's workers and future export sectors. By most estimates, fresh water resources are expected to reach a crisis situation in the next five to ten years. Without serious attention to declining water resources, Yemen will no longer be able to rely on agriculture as a primary source of employment. End summary/comment.

WATER, WATER, ... NOWHERE

2. According to the World Bank, Yemen's agricultural sector accounts for 21.6 percent of GDP, employs fifty percent of the workforce and could be considered as a potential sector for export growth. The agricultural sector draws approximately 90 percent of the water resources. Yemen boasts the highest fertility rate in the Middle East: 6.7 children per woman. Some international observers in Yemen believe the unofficial birthrate to be even higher and expect the population to double again in ten years. This explosive growth rate, coupled with estimates of water withdrawals at approximately 125 percent of actual renewable water resources, creates a rapidly accelerating water crisis in the years to come. Ref A explains the water situation in the central city of Taiz.

3. The water situation in Sanaa, while not as severe as in Taiz, also suffers from a low underground water basin. One businessman mentioned that ten years ago, when he was building his house, the well he dug hit water 60 meters down. In the last year, he dug 300 meters to reach underground water. Municipal services in Sanaa, such as, water, electricity and sanitation do not connect to most homes with any consistency in frequency or coverage.

YEMEN,S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS IN DETAIL

4. Yemen enacted the Environmental Protection Law under Law No. 26 in 1995. This law established an environmental protection council to prepare a national policy for environment protection and to coordinate that policy with other relevant government bodies. The law contained extensive provisions on the protection of water, soil and use of pesticides; regulation of environmentally damaging activities such as hazardous waste handling; and marine pollution. On July 13, 2004 the Council of Ministers approved a significant by-law for the Ministry of Water and Environment, which now oversees the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The regulations enhanced and strengthened the ministry's role in development of water resources and efforts at increasing strategic planning, international cooperation, and inter-agency cooperation. At the same time, the by-law enacted measures to prevent the pollution of the environment and to ration, protect, and conserve natural resources.

5. Yemen is party to the following international agreements: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, and the Kyoto Protocol.

6. Articles 6 through 14 of the comprehensive 1995 Environmental Protection Law regulate the protection of water, soil and use of pesticides. Article 9 prohibits any activity that directly or indirectly damages the soil or its fertility. Article 14 prohibits any activity to the vegetation of any area that causes desertification. This includes the cutting or removal of any forest tree, shrub or bush without permission from government authorities.

7. Articles 15 through 21 regulate the handling and use of pesticides. For instance, Article 17 provides for the registration period of any pesticide for a period of five years and extensions thereof. Article 19 stipulates the conditions for storage and warehouse sites as "far away" from populated areas, commercial zones, or foodstuffs manufacturing.

18. Articles 22 through 44 provide detailed guidelines for the control of environmentally damaging activities, environmental disasters, standards and licensing. As to the handling of hazardous wastes and materials, Articles 45 to 55 specify such regulations as: the state shall bear the direct and indirect expenditures which arise from the measures to prevent improper disposal of hazardous waste.

19. Articles 62 to 64 govern marine pollution issues and define the discharge of pollutants in the territorial waters, the continental shelf of the exclusive economic zone to be an offense.

10. Articles 75 to 95 specify environmental damage violations, liability, punishment and compensation. For example, Article 83 outlines the liability for environmental risk to correlate to compensations for damages that arise due to polluting materials and shall be applied according to the rules of Sharia Islamic law and others.

11. As is with the case with many laws in Yemen, the Ministry and the EPA have solid legal grounds to carry out environmental policy. Government agencies, however, suffer from poor central government support and inadequate budget resources for law and regulatory enforcement. Examples of poor enforcement include the turtle poaching on the Indian Ocean coast, clear-cut forests and countless roads built without environmental impact statements and EPA coordination.

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